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ABSTRACT

This speech outlines a local elementary principals association's innovative program of career development for elementary school principals. This program consisted of three elements: (1) human relations skills, (2) management training, and (3) internships. The program's uniqueness centered around its longrange training projections for currently employed or newly appointed principals, and for future appointees on a continuing basis. (LLR)

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL
or
THE VANISHING PROFESSION

I would like to change the title of my talk today from what it is in the program, "In-Service Programs", to "Career Development for the Elementary School Principal, or the Vanishing Profession". I refer to the Vanishing Profession, for unless we prepare ourselves for what is ahead, the cold possibility exists that the elementary principal will become like the lost city of Atlantis, covered over by the waves of change.

Our society has altered dramatically from what it was just ten or twenty years ago, and much of it will be unrecognizable in the next decade or two. The children in our schools will live most of their adult years in the 21st century. The demands on the schools already are taxing the skills of today's principal, and the pressures continue to mount. As we look around us today, and into the future, we have begun to realize the skills for doing our jobs cannot be horse and buggy skills in a jet age.

This sharp change in the professional life style of the elementary principal moved our local association three years ago into examining the in-service training available to us in our own school system, one wherein the elementary schools alone number 165. Ed Felegy, our then association president, asked me to chair a committee, entitled "The Development of the Principalship". In outlining his rationale, he wrote, "We have at this time a very large number of active, young (certificated) administrators at the elementary level--both principals and assistant principals. Many can easily project a continuing career in the elementary field over a period of the next twenty to even thirty years service. We know that over such a time span the nature of the elementary school will change dramatically, and most

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likely at a continually accelerated pace. What is our school system prepared to do," he asked, "to insure that this large body of personnel, the vast majority of whom are 'career' people, will be fully prepared to cope with these changes?"

His thoughts paralleled Ruth Crossfield's, who in the April 1968 issue of the National Elementary Principal said, "In this era of knowledge explosion, Boards of Education must recognize the need for continuing education of administrators, and must permit - perhaps require - administrators to spend part of their regular working hours on in-service education activities: This may mean taking graduate courses in education, attending seminars, visiting other schools, visiting regional laboratories, participating in other kinds of in-service activities still to be created and developed."

Implied in both Pelegy's and Crossfield's thinking is that in-service for elementary principals needs to become more visible as the responsibility of your school systems and school districts. Underlying their thinking is that in-service, if it is to be effective, demands three built-in elements: it has to be long-range, it needs to be continuous, and it must be comprehensive.

I would like today to share with you aspects of our committee's work. We feel it has helped our principals, and our school system. Perhaps some of what we have done can be of benefit to you, too.

When we started as a fledgling committee, we followed a natural inclination which we thought would save us a lot of work. It was quite simple: find out what other school systems were doing for long-range, continuous, comprehensive in-service training, and then cull from them their best suggestions.

To that end we sent requests for information to 45 school systems throughout the nation, some considered to be quite progressive and, I am certain, well known to you. We asked, too, for information from several recommended university professors, authorities on school administration, as well as the research facilities of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Listen to what we found out.

There was a great deal of talk about the changing role of the principal, and a great deal of written material about the changes in education for the 70s and 80s, but no one seemed to be doing much about preparing elementary principals for these changes. Not only did we find practically no information or program for truly long-range, continuous training of the elementary principal, but there seemed to be little thinking about such a plan.

This startling revelation reminded me of the Russian who was visiting the American corporation president to find and buy the most efficient machines for his factory in Russia. The two were standing in front of the big bay window of the executive office when the twelve o'clock whistle blew, at which point 5,000 workers streamed out of the plant, moving briskly through the front gate. The Russian, quite visibly agitated, jumped up and down and shouted, "Stop them, stop them, they're escaping." The corporation president responded calmly, "Don't worry; they'll be back." At one o'clock the whistle blew again, and sure enough, the 5,000 workers streamed back through the gates, entered the plant, and went back to work. The president resumed his conversation. . . "Now let's get down to business, about those machines you wanted to buy. . ." "Never mind the machines," exclaimed the Russian, "What I want to buy is the whistle."

It seems, sadly, that our professional group, the elementary principal, has been getting along on whistles, the whistles of the past, instead of the machines of the future. To think that we have plodded through one college course after another, faced one in-service session after another in our local school systems (we have been in a most blissful state), only to find that outside of lots of talk, that nowhere have our school districts (and let's not forget our universities) gotten down to any concrete, long-range programs of development--vital lifelines for us if we are to cope with the tide of change in this world we live in.

In short, the elementary school principal, I feel, is moving perilously close to becoming a vanishing profession--much like the saddlemaker, who, seeing the silhouette of the automotive age rolling over the horizon, turned his head to his half-completed saddle, and coveting his hard-earned skills, continued to pound away, with an even greater vengeance than before. Perhaps his myopic view was, for him, security, a safe haven, but today the streets are filled with automobiles - and he is gone.

Who is to blame for our unpreparedness? Perhaps the fault lies with our school systems for its own debilitating myopia, for lacking industry's broad vision that executive personnel are assets which need constant updating of their skills. Any company worth its salt has a career training program for its people. Perhaps the fault lies with us and the inertia of some local principals associations.

You might be familiar with the gentleman who became engaged to one of twin sisters. Both of these girls were particularly ravishing, but so alike they were extremely difficult to tell apart, so much so that one of the local wags asked the prospective groom how he was going to make a distinction between the girls after he was married. "That," he answered, "is a problem which I do not consider to be mine."

Such a decision might be tempting to defer, but for us to look the other way, and pound more diligently on the saddle, as change rolls down over us, is not worth the view.

Such was our thinking. Our local association felt we could not afford to buy the same old whistle, so we decided to forge our own career development model.

We approached this somewhat awesome task by structuring for ourselves a conceptual model. The model suggests that societal factors lead to implied educational changes, which lead to needed competencies, which imply programs of development, which need money. Our task was to explore each elementa, starting with societal factors, and determine a scheme of progression. Let me quickly project this progression with an example.

We have a more vocal population--one that tends to get involved. This is a societal factor. An implication for education is that parents want to have a dialogue or involvement with the school--even to the point of directing the content of the curriculum. One competency needed by the principal is to be able to work with parent groups who act in some advisory capacity to him. Some programs of professional development for the principal would be: group dynamics, group process, or perhaps more broadly, human relations techniques. Budget, of course, would be reflected by the scope of the in-service program.

My example is by no means limited to the societal factor of citizen involvement. This is a sophistocated audience. You know that changes are taking place all around us. But societal forces, like riots, sometimes seem to be off in the distance, happening to others, but not to us. So let us look at our local situations.

We all have increasing enrollments; that isn't in the distance—they are right with us. Many of us are faced with restructuring the components of the school to meeting needs of minority groups, a very real issue. And, of course, affecting us where it hurts are diminishing tax sources, and soaring school costs, mostly for salaries. These are real issues, not only to us, but to the public. The tax rates are squeezing the public, making it more pointed in its scrutiny of the school. The taxpayers have sharpened their pencils, and have started to compute and question the value received for their tax dollars. And who bears the brunt of this questioning? Who is becoming the visible target? A recent study indicated that 67% of the public wants to hold the principal accountable. That's you and me. The effects of societal changes on our schools are very real pressures, indeed, for all of us sitting right here.

These realities leave us no choice but to look more closely at our own competencies—before someone else does it for us. Even this willingness to improve may mean rough sledding for some of us. A member of our Board of Education, also a member of our committee, said, "We recognize the merit of a career development program, but if our colleagues on the Board are to support your proposals, they will need to see the value of career development, not just to the individual principal, but to the school system as a whole." Thus it is, that we not only need competencies to maintain accountability, but we also have to demonstrate to our local school systems to prove, if you will, that they need to support career development programs. Such are the forces acting upon us, right in our own backyards.

I have discussed the rationale on which our committee based its recommendations - recommendations for a career development program. I would like to move my talk into some major elements for the proposal itself.

One postulate, we maintain, is that the principal must be capable, not only of carrying out prescribed educational goals, but he needs to be able to set goals himself, to determine that which should be accomplished. We refer to goal setting skills as tactical functions. A listing of tactical functions includes:

-Ability to recognise, and accept, alternatives

-Human relations skills (individual and group)

_Effective communication skill (oral, written and non-verbal)

-Accounting skill

-Perception of part-whole-relationships

-Action-oriented disposition

-Systems analysis skill

-Ability to delegate responsibility

-Analysis of job functions

-Ability to teach and train personnel

-Knowledge of curriculum design

-Process awareness

-Management skill

-Programming skill

-Public Relations sense

-Ability to organize time

-Sense of timing

A principal needs also to have the technical skills that enable him to analyse how much of the goal has been attained. These kinds of skills our committee called strategic functions. In order to be able to operate strategically, one needs:

-Knowledge of social forces and how to "read" them

-Perspective of where we are, historically

-Ability to discriminate what is objective, and what is subjective

-Sense of one's values, and acknowledgement of others' values

-Ability to foresee consequences and interrelatedness of actions

-Training in inductive and deductive reasoning

-Tolerance for disequilibrium

-An expanding experiential background

-Ability to abstract oneself from immediate situations

-Knowledge of educational theory

-Knowledge of educational psychology

-Sense of balance in emphases

We arrived at a number of suggested programs for attaining these goal-setting skills and goal-analysis skills. These include:

-Internships

-Inter-personal relationships training (workshops)

-Programming training

-Multi-disciplinary seminars and courses

-Public relations training (techniques) (Toastmasters, etc.)

-Communications training (techniques)

-Forums for exchanges of opinions

-Exchange programs with other systems

-Opportunity to serve in other positions in the system

-Opportunity to serve in other positions in other enterprises

-Opportunity to serve on many different intra-system committees

-Opportunity to study research

-Training in school law, contracts, medical and technical advances

-Management training

-Reading and memory courses

-Process training

-Teaching at universities and colleges

We realized, however, that we needed to reduce the number of items on our list during the initial stages of our program. After polling a sampling of our colleagues, we narrowed our list of programs to the top three suggested and requested by them. We referred to these as our basic program. The three, in priority order, are: human relations skills, management training and internships.

Under human relations we included skills in dealing with people, and communication skills, both oral and written. I don't have to tell this group that as school and community leaders, our every decision and act affects our staff, students, parents, as well as others in the community. In our own school system, we now deal with faculty advisory councils, citizens advisory groups, the general community, the school system administration, and the students. Certainly, effective oral and written communication is essential.

The second item of priority, management training, is interpreted as "running the plant", and dealing with personnel in the management sense. One worthwhile plan, we felt, would be for us to have one- to two-week field experiences with private and public corporations, and with governmental agencies. There is no doubt that we could profit from getting in close contact with administrators outside the field of education.

While human relations and management skills pertain very definitely to the principal who has been on the job for awhile, the third priority item, internships, are for the principal just appointed and not yet working in his school. Our committee felt that each new administrator be given advance notice of his appointment, up to a year, but at least prior to April 30th of the preceding school year. In order for the new appointee to get some "feel" for the school system and the job, he needs to have provided for him short periods of work and training with central office personnel, area supervisors, and teams of principals. The new appointee must also have the time to work on the opening of his school: and this exercise should be correlated with the training sessions just suggested.

This basic program of career development we projected as covering the more than 200 elementary principals we should have by the end of the decade. We blocked this out in 3 three-year stages, from 1970-79, and we added flexibility by suggesting both short-term and long-term experiences--during the school year and in the summer months. The total cost for a minimum program should average out to about $100 per year per principal, for the ten years of the 1970s.

What I have described, the basic program, is a bare-bones program. To put a little meat on the bones, we proposed also an extended program to include personnel exchanges. These would involve principals returning to the classroom, administrative personnel switching jobs within the system, administrators switching jobs with administrators outside the system, both in other school districts, or in private industry.

The exchange program has several bonuses. A principal returning to a teaching assignment frees his administrative position to be filled by an assistant principal, an excellent training ground for this assistant: it costs the school system nothing. The principal who takes a classroom also frees a teacher's salary. This can be applied to a resource teacher to work with the assistant principal or with a principal in another school. This resource position provides an excellent training ground for a future curriculum or supervisory person or for a future administrator.

I have outlined briefly elements of our proposal for career development. As a postscript, you might ask, "Whatever happened to your proposals?" I am most pleased that several elements already have been implemented in our school system. In the summer of 1969, at the request of the assistant superintendent for elementary education, several principals were invited to meet with him and the director of staff development and in-service training. The meeting proved quite fruitful. Funds were allotted that summer for a three-day workshop in leadership training, using simulated materials, directed by Dr. James Dudley of the University of Maryland. Also, a group of principals developed with Dr. Dudley two year-long graduate seminars, one entitled "Workshop in Human Relationships in Educational Administration"; the other, "Workshop in Administrative Leadership." In addition to the workshops being given off-campus in our own system, we received 3 graduate credits, and each principal had reimbursed to him $50.00 at the completion of the seminars, paid for by the school system.

At the end of the year, a committee of principals evaluated the workshops, and several changes were incorporated; one basic one, that they be shortened from a full year to one semester. The courses were offered again

this last fall. This spring, a third workshop was offered. Thus far, there have been over 80 administrators who have taken part in the program. We feel we have made an excellent beginning.

Our principals association decided to trade in the tools of the saddle-maker for the career skills needed for the 70s and beyond. We had decided that we didn't want to read a history book one day and find a description of the species that belongs to the vanishing profession, elementarius, schoolatus principalus. We realize that the pressures of the day demand a principal who, at best, needs to have superhuman qualities, and at the very least, needs to gain the skills to get over the hurdles of the 70s.

At the time of our research and our investigations, correspondence with Dr. Robert Jonwiak, Assistant Executive Secretary of the National Association of Elementary School Principals, indicated that no other school system in the nation had yet undertaken, a comprehensive career development program. We chose to tune out the sound of this whistle and to forge ahead on our own--to build the new machines of the future.

If I could leave you with anything today, it would be: Look at the horizon. A new age is upon us. We need to examine career development programs for the elementary principal. This is an ideal time for all of us to assume leadership in this realm. We must move, make this our goal for the 70s. If not, the next whistle you hear may be the dismissal bell for the elementary school principal.